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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 000895

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [DJ](#) [XW](#)
SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI: EASBRIG COMMANDER PREVIEWS JULY 13 'FRIENDS'
MEETING

REF: NAIROBI 1273

1.(U) Action request: see para 7.

¶2. (SBU) Summary: Brigadier General Osman Nour Soubagleh, commander of the East Africa Standby Force (EASBRIG), told Embassy and CJTF-HOA July 8 that the July 13-14 "Friends of EASBRIG" meeting will brief potential donors on the planned 1,500 person multinational Field Training Exercise to be conducted in Djibouti in November 2009. Final decisions on EASBRIG member country participation and contributions will be made at a meeting of regional defense ministers August 2-3. Soubagleh previewed that the USG would be invited to provide tents, sanitation equipment (e.g., portable toilets), support for site preparations, and local ground transportation as an "in-kind" bilateral contribution to Djibouti as host of the exercise. Despite the relatively short lead-time for EASBRIG to organize this complicated exercise, Embassy recommends we provide support. Enhancing EASBRIG supports USG policy to strengthen African regional institutions and military capability. Moreover, supporting this exercise would reinforce our bilateral security partnership with Djibouti, which hosts the only enduring U.S. military installation in sub-Saharan Africa. End Summary.

¶3. (SBU) In a meeting with Ambassador, CJTF-HOA Deputy Commander, and members of their staffs on July 8, Soubagleh confirmed plans to proceed with the November 2009 Field Training Exercise (FTX) in Djibouti. Although final plans have not been determined, the event would involve 1,100 troops plus 400 support personnel, operating from a headquarters in Arta, with additional field elements in Grand Barra and Hol Hol. To date, countries that plan to participate include Djibouti, Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda; Burundi has stated it will not participate (likely due to its deployment in support of the African Union Mission in Somalia). Soubagleh said it would be a "scenario-based" exercise, although the scenario had not yet been developed. He anticipated that the exercise would also include a sealift component, with the Swedes and Danes interested in providing a roll-on-roll-off vessel to transport equipment from Mombasa. While conceding that there were many details to complete within the four months before the exercise would begin, Soubagleh said that EASBRIG continued its preparations and was determined to show its capabilities.

¶4. (SBU) Soubagleh outlined the following timeline for preparation of the FTX:

--July 13-14: Friends of EASBRIG meeting in Djibouti

--July 27 - Aug 2: Key staff officers meet in Addis to refine FTX plan

--August 2-3: Defense Ministers meet in Nairobi to decide final member state contributions

--September (dates TBD): Brigade staff trains in Addis, with ACOTA support

--October (dates TBD): Troops gather and train together in Djibouti for three weeks

--November (date TBD): FTX for one week

15. (SBU) In their responses, Embassy and CJTF-HOA staff stressed U.S. desire to see EASBRIG strengthened and become more effective but noted concern over the ambitious scope of the exercise and the

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tight timelines for completion. Ambassador said it was important for EASBRIG to build a record of success and that it would be better to excel in a modest exercise than fall short in a more complex one. CJTF-HOA Deputy Commander said the deadlines appeared "dangerously short" to plan for success, noting that this undertaking would be complex even for multiple U.S. military units, all working from the same doctrine and a common language. He suggested options for keeping the exercise simple, e.g., by using multiple "lanes" through which each training cohort would proceed, practicing a new skill in each.

16. (SBU) Soubagleh listened politely to these concerns but said EASBRIG needed to show its capabilities. It was already behind other regional standby forces and needed to catch up. He appeared to have a genuine appreciation for the complexities of conducting the FTX as planned. Nonetheless, he believes it can be done and is determined to proceed. Soubagleh is one of only four flag-rank officers in the Djiboutian military, and has received extensive IMET training at the Army Command and Staff College and the Naval Postgraduate School, as well as at the Odessa military academy in the former Soviet Union.

17. (SBU) Comment and Action Request: We remain concerned that the planned FTX is a big bite for EASBRIG to chew, and continue to urge that the FTX be scaled back. In the end, however, this is a decision for the member states. Whatever they decide, we believe the USG has an interest in supporting the exercise. Failure to do so would be contrary to USG policy to strengthen AU regional entities, including the standby forces. Moreover, we believe we have an interest in helping the Djiboutians as host for the FTX. A bilateral contribution to the GODJ in support of the exercise would reinforce our security partnership with Djibouti, which hosts Camp Lemonnier, the only enduring U.S. military installation in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as port facilities used for U.S. Navy refueling and resupply operations. We would welcome talking points from the Department for delivery at the July 13 "Friends of EASBRIG" meeting.

SWAN